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SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PREL PHUM PGOV PREF IS GOI EXTERNAL GAZA DISENGAGEMENT](#)

SUBJECT: ICRC OFFICIAL OPTIMISTIC ABOUT IMPROVED RELATIONS  
WITH GOI

Classified By: DCM Gene A. Cretz for reasons 1.4(b) & (d)

1. (C) Summary: Visiting ICRC Delegate-General for the Middle East and North Africa Balthasar Stahelin told the DCM February 18 that he believes that progress in the peace process could help pave the way for the adoption of a Third Additional Protocol that would facilitate full ICRC membership for Magen David Adom. He said he had expressed concerns to GOI officials about the route of the separation barrier and had urged further prisoner releases as a confidence-building measure in advance of disengagement. The ICRC was surprised, he commented, that the GOI had not included in the prisoner release any of what he said were 400 Palestinian minors detained by Israel. Relations between ICRC and the IDF have improved, he said, as demonstrated by a recent IDF request for ICRC input on rules of engagement. End Summary.

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Magen David Adom  
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2. (C) Saying that ICRC is "on the same page" as the U.S. on the Magen David Adom issue, Stahelin assessed chances for adoption of a Third Additional Protocol as optimum now in light of progress in the peace process and what he said was Swiss readiness to advance the issue. He noted that adoption of a Third Additional Protocol could also help Eritrea, which has used the double sign of the Red Cross and Red Crescent for years. Stahelin noted that Secretary of State Rice and ICRC President Kellenberger agreed to support this process during their February 14 meeting in Washington. While somewhat concerned about the chances of success on passage of the protocol, he said that it was only necessary to get the support of key players in each of the regional blocs and that is where we needed to focus our efforts.

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Fence/Prisoner Release  
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3. (C) Without providing details, Stahelin said he had expressed ICRC concerns about the route of the separation barrier in his meetings with GOI officials during his visit. Turning to the issue of prisoner releases, Stahelin said that the ICRC had asked the GOI to release more prisoners before disengagement as a confidence-building measure. He noted the disparity in the prison population between Gaza and the West Bank (most Palestinian prisoners are from the West Bank). He said there are currently 11,500 Palestinian prisoners in Israeli hands, 1,000 of whom are administrative detainees, clarifying that all Israeli jails are on Israeli territory.

4. (C) Stahelin said ICRC was surprised that none of the 400 Palestinian children currently detained by Israel were included in the recent release. He said that the large majority of these children are between 17 and 18, and that 60 are under 16. He emphasized that the large majority had already served most of their sentences.

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ICRC and the IDF  
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5. (C) Stahelin pointed to signs of growing trust between ICRC and the IDF, notably a recent request by the IDF for ICRC to advise/comment on revised IDF rules on engagement. Prime Minister Sharon, MOD Political Security Chief Amos Gilad and MFA officials have all, he said, recently expressed greater support for the relationship. The Israeli impression that ICRC had limited value was based on the GOI impression that ICRC had done little on Israeli POWS/MIAs in the past with the Syrians. Recent ICRC efforts on Israel's behalf -- assistance in the searches for Israeli MIAs from Sultan Yakub, Ron Arad, and Guy Hever -- had, however, all helped to strengthen the ICRC-IDF relationship, Stahelin said.

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